

Beach Vitex Invades the Carolina Coast

Threatening Native Dune Plants and Sea Turtles

Beach vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*) is a deciduous, woody vine from Japan and Korea that was introduced to the southeastern U.S. in the mid-1980s as an ornamental landscape plant as well as for sand dune stabilization. Along the coast of North and South Carolina, beach vitex has escaped cultivation and covered oceanfront dunes. Beach vitex crowds out native dune plants such as sea oats, American beachgrass and seaside panicum. In addition, beach vitex threatens endangered loggerhead sea turtle nesting habitat as well as habitat for a federally threatened plant, seabeach amaranth and other rare species.



Photo by Betsy Brabson

Beach Vitex dominates a section of sand dunes on Bald Head Island, NC



Photo by Melissa Hedges



Photo by Dale Suiter

Sand dunes overtaken by beach vitex (above) in contrast with adjacent dunes dominated by native plants (right), both at Dunescape Villas, Atlantic Beach, NC



Photo by Dale Suiter



Photo by Dale Suiter



Photo by Betsy Brabson

Invasive Qualities of Beach Vitex:

- Drought and salt tolerant
- Fast growing
- Prolific seed producer (see photo left)
 - Birds eat seeds and aid in distribution
 - Seeds float and can be carried to other beaches
- Brittle stems break off during high tides, float away, root and colonize other beaches (see photo right)
- Seeds and cuttings that are chipped up and spread as mulch may start new populations

What can you do to help?

- Do not plant beach vitex.
- Notify the Beach Vitex Task Force of any populations that you find, including address or GPS coordinates.
- Remove beach vitex seedlings from public beach areas.
- Contact the Beach Vitex Task Force for advice on removal of mature beach vitex colonies and replacement with native plant species.
- If removal of beach vitex is not a short term option, consider the following:
 - Remove ripe fruits before dispersal by birds or water.
 - Trim back branches that may break off and float away.
 - Put all beach vitex clippings in a plastic trash bag so they will go to the landfill, rather than be chipped and spread as mulch.



Photo by Betsy Brabson

Beach vitex at Debidue Beach, SC

For additional information or to help prevent the spread of beach vitex, please contact:
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Beach Vitex Task Force Web Page: <http://www.northinlet.sc.edu/resource/vitex.htm>

